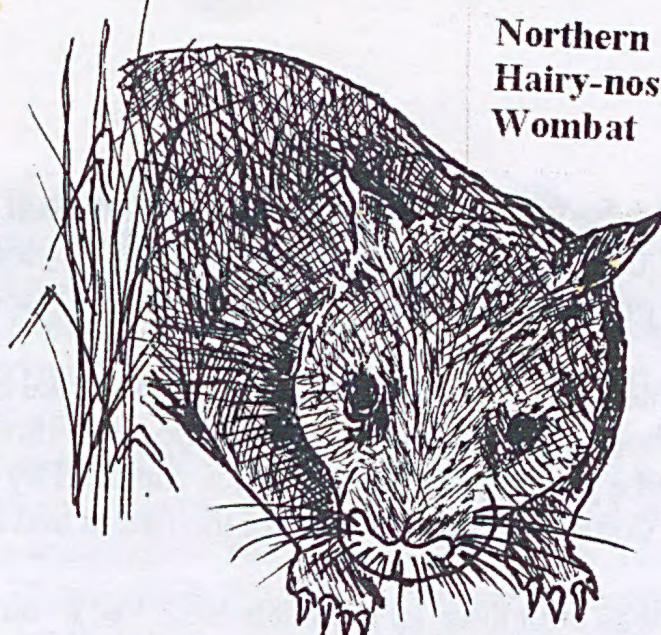


Castlemaine Naturalist

March 2004
Vol. 28.2 #308



Kookaburras at "Buda"

(Thanks to Dianne Thomson for this report)

About three years ago a nesting box designed for kookaburras was placed on the lower trunk of the magnificent old sugar gum in the nursery area at "Buda" garden in Hunter Street. Previously the birds had been seen working away at a potential hollow, where a large limb had fallen off, in order to produce a nesting site.

Later they transferred their attentions to the dense accumulation of fibre under the foliage of the Chinese windmill palm near the side entrance gate, and it was decided a nesting box could be useful.

At last there has been a result and a pair of fledglings are the evidence of success. On one occasion they were perched shakily on the power line to our house across the road from "Buda", and were being harassed by several blackbirds.

The family is still around the area, and can be heard regularly.

Shirley Parnaby

Gower School Birds

26/12/03 – 3- 4.15pm. Sunny and warm.

Fuscous Honeater (Breeding) > 1 Red Wattlebird >1

Owlet Nightjar (in regularly watched hole)

Magpie 6

Red-rumped Parrot (B) >1

Sacred Kingfisher 1

Yellow-tufted Honeyeater >1

Spotted Pardalote 1

Dusky Woodswallow (B) >1

Gilbert's Whistler (1 seen/ another heard)

Grey Shrike-thrush 1

Also:- Martin sp. and Cuckoo-shrike sp.

Willy Wagtail 1

Eastern Rosella >1

White-browed Babbler 1

Superb Fairy Wren >1

Brown Treecreeper >1

Striated Pardalote 2

White-browed Woodswallow 1

Philip West

No Galahs, Australian Raven, Crested Bellbird, Chestnut-rumped Heathwren, Common Bronzewing or Rufous Whistler this year but the inclusion of the Owlet Nightjar, Sacred Kingfisher, Gilbert's Whistler, and a White-browed Woodswallow is pleasing. (Editor's note)

The Fight to Save the Northern Hairy-nosed Wombat

Meeting: 13/2/04. Guest Speaker: Jason Edwards, Ecologist and Wildlife Photographer published in National Geographic and Australian Geographic.

Last year Jason was invited to visit Epping National Park, 830km north west of Brisbane to photograph the Northern Hairy-nosed Wombat. Epping is a Scientific Park (you need a permit to enter it) and it is enclosed by a cyclone fence to keep dingoes out. Volunteer caretakers patrol the fences and help with the dingo baiting programmes.

The fence was built after 10 wombats were lost to dingoes in 1980. While it keeps the dingoes out it has altered the migratory patterns of kangaroos and wallabies in the area and the grass has increased making it harder to see the wombats as they move about the park. Eating increased amounts of the grass is also thought to be altering the sex ratio of the wombats and with only 30 breeding females remaining, they may well breed themselves into extinction.

Shortage of wombat burrows is another concern. Usually found under Bahinea(?) trees, which are thought to hold the soft river sand in place, wombats will live in the same burrows for decades, adding and extending all the time. And while the park area is limited (and cannot be expanded because it is enclosed by farmland where land clearing continues to this day), the wombats only live along certain parts of the riverbank area and cannot be enticed to expand their territory.

Although Jason took part in a trapping programme in May and stayed on after everyone else had gone home, and visited again in November, he only managed a few close up shots of these elusive animals. This was despite sitting for hours at a time, at night, up a tree, on a small wooden platform. On one occasion he photographed a single animal that was trapped and anaethetised for insertion of an identity chip and lengthy testing. On another he managed a series of three shots as a large animal came out of a burrow, came towards him, pushed past him and disappeared down the burrow he was hiding in! Jason refrained from showing us lots of shots of the rear ends of a wombats as they disappeared from view but did show some very fine shots of other wildlife in the park.

While there were plenty of footprints each morning (that looked like children have been running barefoot about the park), the animals' avoidance behaviour was very frustrating. The wombats usually only surface for 4-5 hours a night and they cannot be enticed into the open with water or food and in fact will avoid sites for weeks on end if they are suspicious. They only need to drink once a fortnight because the humidity deep in their burrows is so high.

The main way of recording population numbers is by collecting hair samples left on sticky tape near the entrance to burrows. The hair can then be DNA tested and individuals identified.

These largest of all wombats once covered a large area, coming as far south as Denilquin where fossilised remains have been found. To date, just 113 have been recorded in the park.

Geraldine Harris

Alpine National Park.... or Cow Paddock? It's up to us.

The Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) has recently distributed an excellent poster documenting in words and photographs the damage caused by grazing cattle in Victoria's Alpine National Park – a park that the Association, supported by the Australian Conservation Foundation, argues "should be the core of a region with World Heritage significance".

Grazing licences are due for renewal in 2005 and the State Government is expected to decide whether to allow renewals by August 2004. The VNPA is seeking to mobilise community support in a campaign to halt cattle grazing in the Victorian alpine park, as is the case in NSW. Dating from the 1850's, grazing has been the subject of successive scientific reports that have led to a gradual phasing out of the practice in some areas. But current licences still allow access to around 214,000 ha (about one third of Victoria's Alpine National Park) with some of the most sensitive alpine areas still being most heavily grazed.

The VNPA believes the impacts of continued grazing and trampling include-

- Increased risk of extinction for at least 50 threatened species
- Increased weed infestation and competition with native species
- Damage to stream banks and ancient peat bogs and moss-beds - prime sources of high quality water in the alps with a very slow rate of recovery.
- Increased siltation and nutrient loads affect rivers and dams downstream and can introduce pathogens to waterways causing health problems for park visitors.

The VNPA estimates income from grazing licences to be \$30-40,000 (\$5.50 per head per summer season), but the cost to taxpayers to 'manage' alpine grazing is estimated to be at least \$600,000 per year.

The continuation of alpine grazing, despite fifty years' scientific evidence of ecological damage is, in the words of Dr Richard Groves, Senior Principal Research Scientist with CSIRO, 'an indictment of Victoria's land management authorities'. This article is based on the 2003 VNPA poster entitled Alpine National Park....or cow paddock? (www.cowpaddock.com)

Angela Munro

Mistletoe Meeting

A meeting with Rob Price (DNRE) called recently to discuss the mistletoe 'problem' was attended by people on both sides of the debate – those for and those against mistletoe on our trees. A decision was made at the meeting to carry out a trial pruning of mistletoe from particular trees along the road to Chewton, at the bottom of McKenzies Hill and at the Campbell's Creek Sports Ground. It is reported that all of the trees to be pruned are planted trees.

Of greater concern might be the long-term effects of ecological thinning and removal of trees to make way for development. With fewer trees about, those trees remaining may well be subjected to increased mistletoe infestation. And what can be done for the many local trees not affected by mistletoe but clearly stressed as a result of the lack of rain?

Geraldine Harris

Books for your Library

The Birds of Prey of Australia – a field guide by Stephen DeBus, published by Oxford Press and Birds Australia. Paperback. 1998. There are many books about the Australian hawks. Most of us have found identification difficult because feather and colour patterns often do not seem to match what is shown in illustrations. In the first chapter DeBus writes “A more fruitful approach is to ignore minute plumage details and instead concentrate on shape, relative proportions, flight behaviour... and characteristic behaviour or mannerisms and calls.” The book is illustrated with paintings, photographs and black and white. This is an impressive book. The Castlemaine Library has a copy. 598.9 DEB.

Australian Fungi Illustrated by I.R. McCann, published by Macdown Publications. 2003. Paperback. Over 400 species are illustrated. Illustrations have the common and scientific name, the family and habitat. The book illustrates many more species than the other popular fungi books that I have seen.

A Field Guide to the Mosses and Allied Plants of Southern Australia by David Maegher and Bruce Fuhrer, published by the Australian Biological Resources Study and the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria. 2003. Paperback. Mosses, lichens and liverworts have been difficult to identify. This book goes a long way towards making identification easier. The difference between the plant groups are clearly explained, and for each species there is a coloured plate, a description, notes on the habitat, and reference to similar species. *Perhaps some member of the club will take up moss and lichen identification. It would be great to have a moss and lichen list for the district.*

Erin Perkins

Gum Swamp and Eight Mile Escape Channel

On our trip to NSW in August we spent a week in Dubbo, visiting the western plains Zoo on two occasions. I thought that this would have been the highlight of the trip, but that came on our visit to Forbes.

Gum Swamp is just on the edge of town, and we visited it several times. I saw a magnificent White-bellied sea-eagle, a Peregrine falcon, rafts of Pink-eared Ducks, lots of Pacific Black Ducks and Grey Teal, a few Freckled Ducks, Dusky Moorhens, Purple Swamp Hens, Coots, Willie wagtails, Cockatoos, and a flock of Grey-crowned Babblers living at the edge of the swamp. We were advised to go along at sunset, and the light on the water was beautiful, especially with the clouds reflected in the perfectly still surface. We hadn't brought the camera that evening, or even the video camera, so we determined to go back again the next evening and, although there were ripples on the water that time, and the clouds weren't so colourful, we still got some good images.

We stopped at Eight Mile Escape Channel reedbeds just south of Wanganella, half an hour's drive north of Deniliquin, both on the way up and the way back home. Clamorous Reed-warblers were very much in evidence the second time, and beside

the usual swans and ducks there were a number of White-necked Herons, and a small flock of Pied Stilts. I spotted the flock of about twenty Glossy Ibis on the second visit. Quite a bit smaller than the White and Straw-necked Ibises, they look quite black until the sun catches them, and then the rich brown plumage with its rainbow hues really is eye catching.

Rita Mills

Observations

- On a cooler overcast morning in February, Margaret Badminton observed 50-60 Fork-tailed Swifts Flying overhead while visiting her block near the Castlemaine Golf Course. Some Dusty Woodswallows were flying with them. Margaret also noticed large flocks of Red-rumped Parrots along the roadside that same morning.
- At home on the north west edge of the Muckleford Forest Alison Rowe noted a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater visiting her birdbath for a week in January. She also had two Diamond Firetails visiting that month. In February she saw thirty Little Lorikeets.
- Geoff Harris also noted two Diamond Firetails on the ground just metres away as he worked in the vegetable garden at Barkers Creek in February – the first sighting for some years.
- Chris Morris saw Blue-billed Ducks, Crested Grebes and a good range of other birds including a large flock of Zebra Finches at the Harcourt Reservoir despite the fact that it is at about 1/10 its normal capacity. (Zebra finches have been present in the Harcourt area for the past 20 years – Rita)
- Robyn Garnett was curious to know if a Green Budgerigar sighted 10km out of Myrtleford would have been wild or an escapee. Members agreed it was most likely an escapee if it was alone.
- Richard Piesse reported a textbook example of a magnificent pendulous mistletoe on a dead eucalyptus near where he lives. It was agreed that this was probably a final attempt to set seed before it's inevitable demise.
- A juvenile Golden Whistler was being chased in the yard by Brown-headed Honeyeaters. And two Galahs have been busy trying to make a hollow in a tree where a branch broke off years ago. Rita Mills
- Chris Morris noticed dozens of birds of varied species sheltering in the cool shaded areas and around the birdbaths during the very hot weather.
- Coming home at 11pm. we encountered two small kangaroos in the middle White Gum Road. As we approached slowly they moved off ahead of us along the road and no matter what we did we could not get them to move off to the side. By the time we reached the last turn in our road there were six small to medium kangaroos jumping along in front of the car! They eventually let us pass. Geraldine Harris

Photographic Competition The North Central Catchment Management Authority would like to capture the essence of our unique environment through the camera lenses of our community. Photos can be historical or recent, black and white

or coloured, digital or hardcopy but they must be from within this region and taken by amateur photographers. Cash prizes for best three entries and a camera will go to the school of the best student entry. Entries close 5pm Friday 28 May. For further information visit www.nccma.vic.gov.au or Tel 5448 7124.

Farewell to Darren Bos 17/2/04

About 50 people representing a variety of environmental groups gathered to show their appreciation to Darren and to wish him well in his new job. Doug Ralph and Marie Jones made a small presentation to Darren and praised him for the job he had done. They spoke particularly of the way he had managed to get different environmental groups communicating and working together toward a common goal and emphasised the importance of such a position in the shire.

Thanks to Hans and Anne van Gemert who did such a wonderful job organising the event.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Website

It was decided in January that Em proceed with designing a Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club website. The site could be used as an additional way of distributing the newsletter and selected articles from other publications, for informing members of local field items of interest, and as a first contact point for new members who might like to attend our meetings or excursions. If you have any contributions or ideas for this website please contact Em.

Nature Notes for Newstead

Francis Cincotta has begun to write a regular column for the Newstead Echo – “Move over Rose” (borrowed from a favourite book title “Move over Rose – here comes the Blue Devil) where she intends to write about some of the “happening” in her garden, her nursery, and the local bushland. Regular readers will be treated with pieces that are sure to interest and inform as Frances dips into her wealth of knowledge to generously share with readers.

From the Business Meeting 12/2/04

- **Welcome** to new member, June Symons.
- A sincere **vote of appreciation** to those committee members standing down after many years of service – Barbara Maund, Audrey Oliver, and John Turnbull. Thank you also to John Cole for his year of service. Audrey will continue to help with suppers but has handed some of this duty to Helen Morris. Rita Mills has passed the position of Newsletter Editor to Geraldine Harris after years of dedicated work. Thank you all for your valuable input and support during your time in office.
- **Congratulations** to Rita Mills in her new position as Vice President and to new committee members Athol Dorman and Nigel Harland. **Additional new committee members would be most welcome.**

- **Frank Panter** attended the meeting to draw attention to **proposed planning scheme amendments** included in the Urban Living Strategy that **threaten** to have a great affect on **bush around Castlemaine**. Castlemaine has always had buffer areas of bushland surrounding the township and these are now threatened by plans for high and low density residential areas right up against the forests. These plans also include rezoning of the Harcourt Bushland Reserve to Industrial zoning. It was decided to send a brief letter to each councillor listing the reasons for maintaining buffer zones.
- Ern and Lesley Perkins recently made a **presentation to the Maldon Atheneum Library**, on behalf of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club, of copy of "Victoria's Box-Ironbark Country" in memory of past member, Neil Amor.
- A letter is to be sent concerning plans to permit **firewood collection** in the Sandown Forest, Glenluce, Muckleford Forest and the SE section of the Metcalfe Forest, to inform the authorities involved of the **presence of endangered local native species** such as the Goldfields grevillea (*Grevillea dryophylla*) and Emerald-lip Greenhood (*Pterostylis smaragdyna*) in these areas.

Extra Events for your Calendar

Sun. Mar. 21. Small Property Management and Landcare – introductory course
 A six day course running one Sunday per month and comprising a two hour morning session with theory and guest speaker followed by a practical field visit. Course includes property planning, pest plant and animal identification and control, pasture management, potential enterprises for small holdings, fencing, landcare, native vegetation and managing your bit of bush. For details contact: Dean Bridgefoot Tel: 54 711736 or Greg Cahill Tel: 54 304518.

Thu. Apr. 1. Beyond Litigation Workshop (Nipping Environmental and Planning Disputes in the Bud). Environmental Defenders Office (Vic) Ltd. 10am - 4pm. Legal Aid Bendigo, 424 Hargreaves St, Bendigo. For those wanting to study Alternative Dispute Resolution processes. Limited Places. For further info or registration contact Mandy Bathgate at the EDO on (03) 93284811 or email: edovic@edo.org.au

Fri. May 28 – Mon. May 31. The Cryptogamic Extravaganza II. (staying at Norval Lodge, Halls Gap in the spectacular Grampians) A weekend with like minded naturalists and experts in the fields of macro fungi, micro fungi, mosses, liverworts, lichens and freshwater algae. Bunk accommodation, meals provided, guided walks and afternoon activities led by Tom May, Teresa Lebel, Ian Pascoe, Pina Milne, David Meagher, Bruce Fruhrer, Sharon Morley, and others.
 Contact: Sharon.Morley@dpi.vic.gov.au or Tel: 9210 9211 (BH)

Articles Welcome - Articles, reports and observations can be left with Noellene at Tonks Bros., Barkers Street, Castlemaine or sent to P.O.Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450. Articles need to be submitted by the 4th Thursday of the month.

Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme - March, 2004.

General meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.

Excursions are usually on the Saturday following the general meeting, and leave promptly at the times stated from The Octopus, opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

Fri. Mar. 12. *Bolivia and Peru.* Geoff Harris. UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat. Mar. 13. *Ellis Falls on the Coliban River, Taradale.* Leader: Chris Morris. Leave octopus at 1.30pm sharp.

Fri. Apr. 2. (*note early meeting date) *Western Australia.* Em Perkins. UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat. Apr. 3. *Mistletoe Walk.* Leader: Em Perkins. Leave Octopus at 1.30pm sharp.

Fri. May 14. *Odonata, The Life of Dragonflies & Damselflies.* Ian Endersby. UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat. May 15. *Heritage Walk:* Short walk to horse paddock in *Cobblers Gully from Eureka Reef* car park. Return for billy tea and damper. Leader: Doug McConville (FOMAD), Tel. 5470 6332. Meet at Market Building, 1.30pm sharp.

Friday Jun. 11. *The Importance of Environmental Flows in Rivers, Streams and Wetlands.* Dr. Paul Sinclair of Environment Victoria.

Sat. Jun. 12. *Cairn Curran.* Leader still to be decided.

2004 Committee - C. Morris (President) ph. 9885 4221, Rita Mills (Vice President and Public Officer) ph. 54724553, G. Broadway (Secretary) ph. 5472 2513, H. van Gemert (Treasurer) ph. 5472 1082, G. Harris (Newsletter Ed & Public Officer), E. Perkins, R. Piesse, A. Dorman and N. Harland.

Subscriptions for 2004

Ordinary membership: Single \$22, Family \$30

Pensioner or student: Single \$19, Family \$24

The subscription includes postage of the *Castlemaine Naturalist*.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club, PO Box 324, Castlemaine. Incorporation #A0003010B